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On the Coldest Night of 1873, Sophia Starling Dreams of Being Deflowered by Her Guide, John Sprockett

by Robert Cooperman

Precious columbines bugle fanfares
under a sky blue as John's eye.
He smiles, holds me with hands
suddenly soft as a peer's, and miracle!
his face healed of the grizzly's ripping.

Our clothes fall like uncinched saddles;
grass tickles my face, my bosom,
and I'm ashamed of nothing.
His kisses wander like a hummingbird
that sips and darts and sips again.

Aching, I wake; the hearth, embers,
Mr. Sprockett hunting before dawn
to keep us from starving one more day.
Mr. Crane whimpers, shakes like a mouse;
I toss him my bedroll, stumble to the hearth;
the siftings of snow I sweep out the door
slap back at my face.

Mr. Crane whines we must lie together
or perish of the cold.
"We'll die then," I tell
the alleged consumptive.
"But first I'll have a cup of tea."
The fire spits like a lynx.
I hide a slab off the last loaf
for John's empty stomach when he returns;
if Mr. Crane noses it out,
I'll flatten his face with the skillet.

Dawn rims the drifts with crimson;
Mr. Crane nibbles a cracker like a rat.
How long, I wonder, before Mr. Sprockett
will kill the whelp and feed on him?
My own starvation would acquiesce,
any love between us flown like a raven—
after partaking of that unholy supper.

